火和戦旗を掲げよ！

2

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2

Fanning the Flames of War! - WN Chapter 00-01

Table of Contents

1. Illustrations
2. Prologue
3. Chapter 1

Illustrations

Illustrations taken from here.

Left to Right- Berton, Yarrick, Daniel Hakkinen, Oiva Otra, Marco, Rory, Axel A

The Holy Flame Festival

Prologue

Prologue – The Holy Flame Festival [Revised]

A man had been burned.

In the center of the piled up firewood, the man was attached onto a log with iron chains. Death by burning. It was a capital punishment. The flames crackled as the heat increased. The body was burnt. His life was taken away.

The onlookers were boiling in excitement. Both men and women, young and old, the rich and the poor were wide-eyed and gaped mouth. The event climax. In the midst of the scene, only 3 people were feeling different from the others.

“Oh..the flames rises! This is purification in true form! The flames of purification!”

Among them, a plump middle-aged priest wearing lavish clothing stood upright near the balcony. He looked around at the people as his resonating, hoarse voice echoed across.

“Our gracious sacred hero had been maliciously plotted and murdered by this man! Truly an act of the devil, this is proof he had been possessed by an evil spirit! Our sorrow is God’s sorrow! Our anger is God’s anger! This is justice!”

The priest scattered sweat and saliva due to the intensity of his hand gestures. However, the words did not stop coming from his mouth. He poured oil onto the people. Fanning the flames, the people even began to scream. It was a crazy festival. If devils truly exist, then the gatherings would exactly be like this.

The girl looked over with a pale face. She was one of the three people. On a building near the square, she trembled on the special seat which was the most suitable to be watching from the second floor. She wore the finest dress which

neatly wrapped her body. The accessories which she wore was the same. She was surrounded by her knight escorts.

“God watches over us! He granted us a blessing! The princess had uncovered the plot of this man, giving us the honor of subduing him! The wise princess! She had lost her beloved hero, but was enlightened!!”

All the boiling excitement was directed to the window, the girl lightly jumped. She was attacked by an intense fear. Her white eyes both widened to a perfect circle, her lips were tightly shut with a tinge of purple.

“…T-this…is all my fault”

She murmured silently. Her sweat did not even drop before it dried off due to the heat.

“I-it’s all my fault…no…why…”

Her voice was not heard both times. Her feeble breath was barely on her tongue as she edged back and without knowing, she plopped down.

“This…is such a terrible feeling…”

If her last word reached one of the three people, that person may have died from indignation. Near the blazing fire, the soldiers had pinned down a women who tried to look up while her cheeks were being pressed against to the stone pavement. She was dressed like a village girl, but she was too muscular for a novice. A well-used sword was dropped nearby.

The woman’s wide-opened eyes were bloodshot. The whites of her eyes were not clearly visible, her back tooth were grinded as she snarled. Her face turned ugly like a demon. Her silver hair reflected against the color of the fire. It seems she was from a minority racial origin.

She was the only person in this place who was trying to save the man from the fire.

And this was the result. It wasn’t possible to move, she can only simple gaze. The scene burned into her soul as the excited onlookers began to dance creating loud footsteps.

At the center of the orange sky… the burning smoke which looked like a black

pillar finally lost shape and left. The crowd shouted with joy. Many stomping footsteps were heard. Her body trembled. The crowd had cruelly enjoyed the death of a person. The woman did not utter a single word.

” O’! The judgement had been passed down! By our flames, the devil had perished now!”
As if mimicking an orchestra, the priest acted like a conductor. He manipulated the people’s excitement with his hand and mouth.

“From now on, this day will be a glorious anniversary! God had reached out during our hardships! We should sing and celebrate! This day is already a thing of the past! Come, let’s toast together!”

Many people dressed in white robes distributed a wine cup to the people around. They seem to have brought in many wine barrels beforehand. It transformed totally into a festival. Cheerful orchestral musics filled the background after the fires became quiet. A song was sung. The people danced. The heat dwell in their mind and body throughout the night….

One man’s death. A grand party before and after the death.

The entire city watched the bonfire and raised a victory song toward the night sky.

During the city’s whole affair, several black lines extended to the outside from the city. It was the waterways with dirty water. The waterways merged into one single stream. The stream flowed gently. The stream spread nourishment around, but on the other hand, it also gathers nourishment from the surroundings. The stream will eventually arrive at the ocean.

The gloomy starry sky casted a shadow underneath the water’s surface… other than the sky’s shadow… a dark-colored fish was chewing over and over again. Over here and there, the fish was eating countlessly while swimming. The fish is eating charcoal-color thing of various sizes. Amongst the city’s thrown garbage, there was the figure of a man.

The fish picked at the gathered lumps. The fish stuffed his cheeks as the water current dispersed every broken pieces. That’s very polite. The fish cherished and ate all the good things inside the body until the end… during the night, the fish began to walk.

The fish walked. Under the water the fish grew legs one after the other, revealing it's appearance. The fish had two awkward looking legs attached to it's body. The fish went up the shore with unsteady steps, wading through the grass. The rate quickened the further he went away from the river. At first, the figure was like a poorly made half fish-man, then the shape gradually change, the fish began to sprint resembling a mouse.

The moon shined as the fish appeared like a gust of wind, passing through the plain and over the hills. It's appearance was filled with countless charcoal dusts, the fish rushed in the forest. The fish did not mind the squirming animals presences. Running at full speed, the fish arrived at a suspicious looking cavern. The fish rushed in. There were lights flickering in the back of the cavern. The fish ran in. The fish rushed in without making any sounds… the dark speck jumped and went inside a pot on a cooking stove.

In a husky voice, someone began to chant.

"His spirit was so strong to be burned this long… I am shocked even though he passed away…"

There was a man of short stature appearing from the shadows, wearing his hood low over his eyes. He stooped low to the pot on the cooking stove, and started a emerald green fire.

"Blood knowledge…a red curse…jealousy and favor…detestable fate…"

The color of the fire turned from green to blue, blue to violet, and then changed into a glaring yellow from purple. The shadow inside the pot was boiling. However, the pot was not hot. It was not a regular fire made from ordinary materials.

This is magic.

Before long, the pot began to crack as the chant ended, the colorful flames were wasted. A gooey liquid was produced. The man resealed it into a small bottle.

The story's curtain began to unfold, as the world went on like usual.

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Chapter 1

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bring them along”

He tried to continue his explanation, but exhaled a small sigh. His selling intuition told him that the dull young boy won’t even be amazed. Anyways, he shouldn’t try to force the young boy to buy.

“That, well… there should be something that would interest the young fellow”

Feeling puzzled and lost, he took a single parchment paper from among his belongings. It was tied by a red string to a hazel-coloured tube. It was newspaper issued in the capital. The article contents of the recent major events were “local-friendly”, profitable for the peddling merchant’s customers.

“I understand that I can’t buy it, if you let me read it here then I don’t mind”

“No, look here, this should be sealed? There should be a unique knot”

Haa, the young fellow had a keen nose. It was quite shocking. Ironically, the young fellow had a innocent smile stunning the peddler.

“Is this your first time seeing the newspaper…?”

Without replying, the young fellow took the parchment and untied the string in a familiar manner. As if he was worried about the direction of the sunlight, he sat near the peddler and crossed his legs. He furrowed his brows, and started to read the newspaper. The young fellow’s manner struck the peddler speechless.

“Oh wow, it’s quite absurd. The princess is pregnant” “That fat priest ordered for custom bishop clothes soon after being promoted” The young fellow muttered while reading the newspaper carefully. The way he grumbles, reminds me of drunken mens in city taverns. Because the earlier comment was done in a childish voice, the peddler had a strange sense of discomfort.

“Thank you very much. I look forward to seeing you again”

The young boy bowed politely after reading the newspaper, and quickly left. In the end, the peddler wasen’t able to speak a word. Before he left, he passed the newspaper and the string along with one white copper coin. The young fellow had paid the proper price for newspaper in the countryside. In fact, the peddler didn’t tell him the price.
He snapped back to reality and chased after the boy in a hurry. He felt something

was wrong. It was not curiosity. Of course, it wasn't a business intuition. However, he was fascinated.

The boy stood out from the others in many ways. He was the only one who felt aloof and nimbly avoided the mud-stained path from the other noisy, clumsy village childrens. He was the only one wearing urban tailored clothes and leather shoes, while the others wore shabby handmade clothes and were barefooted. Although the young fellow had silky, trimmed shoulder-length black hair, he disregarded the others dusty unkempt hair.

The peddler arrived at a lively group under a great camphor tree. It became warmer day by day during spring. The delicate shades of leaves and branches swayed gently in the environment. The group gathered at the base of the big camphor tree, and started to allocate different jobs for the accumlated equipment. There were small wooden chairs, black painted wooden board, chalk and a rag.

"Alright then, let's begin…"

One of them leaned the black painted wooden board without any dirt onto the trunk of the camphor tree. The usage was obvious. This is a classroom. Someone was going to teach.
However, the peddler did not understand. Although the scent of war had faded recently, there were many streams of refuges and bandits everyday. Even in the capital, they did not include education for the poor.
"I see, there is an extra guest"

Although I'd must say… I don't think the countryside is a good place to teach. Even though the young fellow is one of the youngest here, he was the one teaching. The childrens were taught in a ingenious fan-like position so as to not get into each other's way.

"No… for some reason, this feels unsettling"

He might have stepped into a fairy world like in children stories. But such books were too expensive, they were usually read in a rental bookstore. If you look at his perspective… Although he had a bitter sweet childhood, even he had dreams.

"Knowledge is valuable. If a person hinders his studies, he will be

correspondingly rewarded”

The fairies should be coming here soon… The peddler smiled and opened his hands. A warm feeling occurred in his body which had been exposed to the harsh wind of life.

It was a misunderstanding.

He was soon surrounded by small imps who unkindly pulled his beard and poked him. He soon had to make a sincere apology and pay his tuition fees. The tuition was one white copper.

It was cheap. Listening to the lesson, He was convinced. Perhaps the childrens were attending the lecture free of charge, but one white copper was really cheap. Even if it was done in cities, the class lectures would be popular. The literacy lecture contained an exercise problems which were very rare.

For example, reading and writing. The ordinary educating institutions were destoryed by the strong influence of the church. They only practiced repeatedly over the contents of the Bible. Those were the rumours. However, it was different here.

“Please continue to read. [I can do it. I can’t do it. Anyways]”

“[I can do it. I can’t do it. Anyways]”

“[If I can’t do it, I’ll try again tomorrow]”

“[If I can’t do it, I’ll try again tomorrow]”

The peddler hit his knees as he realized, he was too worldly-minded.

“Let’s write this down. [If you want a brother, you should go to bed early]”

“Teacher, why should we go to bed early?”

“Because it will convenient for your parents. Childmaking is a secret romantic spell”

The young fellow taught with an amusing refreshing smile. He told them they might hear shrieks or moans during the night without a guilty conscience. The peddler was surprised when he heard that, people were commonly told several years later that they came out of their parent’s crotch.

He had frequently come across many unusual things in his business career, but it was quite unexpected to hear this kind of subject being taught in a classroom. How much can 10 bags of rough wheat be sold in the city… it was a story often repeated about villagers who fought a fierce battle for money.

“Uh… I decided! With one month’s worth of rough wheat, I want to buy fresh fish and clothes from the flower shop!”

“I would sell the rough wheat to the Starlight and the Solar companies and then buy clothes and shellfish!”

“Okay. If you’ve finished calculating all the transactions, please submit in the wooden boards. The ones who are free should come here and grade”

As a businessman, he could not help himself from being astounded. The each children were calculating the virtual shopping and taking into account all the transactions prices and discounts in order to obtain the most. It should be noted that some of the childrens were not only using the addition method but even multiplication. There were even some childrens who can use division. Usually only merchant apprentices know that – and it gets even worse.

No no, more than anything, the young fellow is already abnormal to teach them!
After the childrens finished the lesson and left, the peddler who was fidgeting did not even move from his spot. A few children surrounded the boy at the base of the camphor tree. They politely asked corresponding questions after the lessons. He continued to wait until everyone left.

“I’m not complaining about the fee, it was worth it but… do you have some free time?”

The young fellow snorted and did not seem to be interested, he was about to go somewhere again. The peddler followed him and thought what unusual things he could offer while rubbing his hands together.

“No, this was a fascinating lesson. Could this village be somewhat related to a merchant?”

“Peddlers like you come once a season. It’s the countryside”

“Well, ah, I see… then why the arithmetics…”

“It’ll become less difficult to be cheated if they can calculate. It is wise to save on deals”

There was no warmth in his voice. On the contrary, this was sarcasm for the peddler. It was common knowledge for peddlers to haggle and sell inexpensive items highly to the country folks who don’t know a single thing.

“Uh, well then, was your dad a merchant in the past?”

“He’s a thoroughbred farmer. My mother is also the same. Although this village is not 30 years old yet, most of the villagers came from villages close to the cities. I think you understand my meaning, yes?”

“That’s… you’ve suffered hardships, right”

This territory was once held by the Astoria Kingdom but had antagonized the western Iberia Empire. Nowadays, this place had rapidly revived in the past few years. This happened after the so-called “The Holy Flame Festival”. Prior to that, there had been a long fifty years’ war.

Thirty years ago, Iberia had been pushing forward with their invasion. The Astoria Kingdom had been outnumbered and had barely left any resistances. The south, middle, and northern region had been dyed by the color of Iberia. During wartime, soldiers often started pillaging before occupying the area. In order to avoid it, they had no choice but to fall back or run to the southern border. There is probably at least one of the villagers who had chosen the latter.

Thinking deeply about the Kiko village’s past, the peddler suddenly realized. No. He shouldn’t be thinking about these things. He quickly caught up the distance that had been opened a little.

“Wait, I just want to know a little. About how much arithmetic can you use?”

“As much as a head clerk in a merchant’s household”

“W-what!?”

In front of the shocked peddler, the young fellow wore a cruel smile for the first time.

“A clever merchant can live. Although the area might take awhile to completely revive, it’s wonderful that success and failure will only depend on one’s ability.

More than anything, only an utter fool would bear the consequence by being killed by a selfish individual”

He should be around five to six years old. He should be just a kid from the countryside. Even so, the peddler was awed when he looked into the young fellow’s profound blues eyes. Due to his career, he had met with many people but he couldn’t recollect any of them like this.

No… He remembered there was one such person. But that kind of man shouldn’t be in this kind of lifestyle. There were many stories concerning that man but the world’s opinion of him unsettled the peddler.

It has been said, he was the biggest criminal that planned the death of the hero. The princess that had fell in love with the hero, received a blessing from the church and finally brought his death. The bloodythirsty madman who had killed both friends and foes with his sword. The devil who had tried to bring harm to the human society, taking advantage of the chaos during the war. His loathed name was Solomon.

Before the peddler even started shaving a beard, he had met with Solomon at Astoria Kingdom’s militia camp. At that time, military supplies were being delivered. The military personnel in charge of supplies had said the goods were imitations and refused to pay the full price of the goods. He was the one who had threatened the military personnel with his sword and spear. At that place, Solomon charged the military personnel as an “act of embezzlement” where the military personnel denied saying “Other goods were also brought in, so why can’t it be discounted?”. Afterwards, it led to a business negotiation. The peddler remembered it was a good deal.

Solomon. Thirty years did not even pass by. At that time, he had displayed overwhelming swordsmanship. If this young fellow also wields a sword…

“Young lad… what’s your name?”

If his name was Solomon, he would be convinced by it.

“My name’s Marco”

Ah, a different name. That’s natural. However, the impression of young fellow did not disappear as the peddler engraved the name to his memory. He had a

faint premonition, that the young fellow will be extraordinary. In other words.

‘I know about Marco. The world still doesn’t know about Marco. This imbalance is a good fortune. A man cannot grab on a soaring dragon to see the heavens, but if a young dragon were to lie down on the ground, even that ordinary man might be able to see the heavenly scenery.’

In later years, Marco’s name had resounded across the continent. In Marco’s list of confidants, there was one man by the name of Rory. It was the peddler who will later uprooting an influential dishonest noble merchant household, causing them to take flight.

Marco and Rory.

On this spring near the countryside, the two of them appeared like a clever son and his stupid father. That will all be in the past, as it turned into a master-servant relationship when Marco’s military fame shock the whole world.

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